



# Protecting and Retaining Trees

## A GUIDE FOR MUNICIPALITIES AND COUNTIES IN NORTH CAROLINA

*Learn how communities across North Carolina can protect and retain trees. This guide is based on a statewide review of municipal and county land use and tree protection regulations.*

Communities across North Carolina address tree protection and retention in various ways. Some lack any regulations, even unified development ordinances (UDOs) or zoning ordinances, that could be used to protect trees before land is cleared or property use changes. Others have regulations that range from nonbinding recommendations that trees “should be preserved to the greatest extent

possible” during development to prohibitions on cutting any trees without permission. Many local governments have also incorporated provisions that require replacing trees removed in violation of ordinances and protecting trees during construction. Others allow credit towards landscaping requirements for the preservation of existing trees and exempt specific land uses, such as single-family residential development or forestry and farming, from tree protection and planting requirements.

Although examples of local ordinances are included, this guide does not advocate any specific regulation or ordinance. It describes various provisions that local governments have promulgated to regulate trees on private property and how local governments can address tree retention *before* land is developed or land uses change. Common issues facing local governments, such as clearcutting and grading, are also addressed.

### Protection and Retention

Tree protection and preservation ordinances are strategies that communities use to retain existing trees. Goals for protecting individual trees and stands of trees should be part of a community’s forest management plan. Trees are dynamic living organisms that require more than protection to keep them in the community. Without planting and maintenance, tree populations will decrease in number and quality as they are cleared from the landscape, age out, or die from damage, disease, or lack of care. Tree ordinances can ensure the

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